

PROTEST AGAINST OPPRESSION IN ALAN PATON'S SHORT STORY "LIFE FOR A LIFE"

R. VIMALA

Department of English, Government Arts and Science College, Nagercoil, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

During the colonial period the inhabitants of South Africa experienced social and cultural discrimination in all spheres of life. The colonizers considered the non-whites as inferiors and suppressed them and such oppression was cruel and inhuman attitude which suffocated the natives. The European colonizers introduced apartheid system in South Africa in order to bring them under their control. Alan Paton pictures this attitude of subjugation and aims at making an end to this problem. In one of his short story 'Life for a Life' he pictures the sufferings of Enoch Maarman and his family on account of the discrimination between a rich white farmer and a poor brown shepherd. In order to avenge the murder of a rich farmer, the innocent Enoch Maarman is killed and buried. His wife, Sara's voice against the murder of her husband is suppressed. Alan Paton portrays the horrible picture of oppression in the short story.

KEYWORDS: *Life for a Life & Maarman's House*

Received: Jul 11, 2017; **Accepted:** Jul 28, 2017; **Published:** Aug 08, 2017; **Paper Id:** IJELAUG201721

INTRODUCTION

English language and literature expanded as the British Empire spread throughout the globe during the colonial period. Among the several languages spoken in South Africa, English language plays a prominent part. Through their writings in English the South African writers have drawn international attention. In the history of South African literature Alan Paton is recognised as a major writer of fiction dealing with racial discrimination and segregation. Educated in the University of Natal, Alan Paton entered into teaching profession. He worked at Maritzburg College and later became the Principal of Diepkloof Reformatory for the young offenders.

He was attracted towards literature at an early age, reading books of writers like Walter Scott, Charles Dickens and Rupert Brooke. When he was with the school children he was able to understand the inner struggle of the African people and he was most concerned with social problems. He watched the inhuman attitude which was at its peak in South Africa and considered racial discrimination hateful and impossible in application. He delineated the wretched lives and condition of the blacks in South Africa.

South Africa appeared to be a country of boundless beauty, riches and splendour. Its great cities, hills, mountains, rivers, valleys, gold mines and rich minerals exhibited its greatness. The brightness of flowers and sounds of birds kindled the aesthetic sense. The inhabitants lived happily, nurturing their culture and developing their cordial social relationship. To mar such situations, the colonization happened and gradually the colonizers implemented 'the apartheid' system in order to bring the non-whites under their control and to introduce White supremacy.

Many leaders fought against this cruel attitude under the leadership of Nelson Mandela. Both Black and White writers depicted the terrible lives of the people. Alan Paton's voice against racial problems is the most powerful and his short story 'Life for a Life' is a realistic picture of the sufferings of a Shepherd and his family.

Flip was one of the richest farmers of Karoo who met with a violent death, but nobody knew who had killed him. It seemed that the whites were all together waiting for justice and they would not rest till then. The Shepherds belonging to the brown race lived in their small stone houses in the valley and their dwelling place was segregated. They were scared and even the children kept silence out of fear as they used to serve the rich farmers like slaves.

Enoch Maarman was the head-shepherd of Kroon. He and his wife Sara were afraid of the whites because they might put the guilt of murder on them at any time and they lived in anxiety because they hated Flip. They thought that someone had to pay for the terrible crime. The white farmers wanted to dominate and show their supremacy over the shepherds. When Enoch Maarman expressed their grief to Flip's son, he replied authoritatively, "that could be so." (p. 11.)

In order to make a detailed enquiry about Flip's death, two detectives reached Maarman's house. Robbertse, one of the detectives started enquiring about Maarman's son who was in Cape Town, at the White university. From him, the detective elicited the answer that his son never came to meet them as the master Flip prevented him from visiting his parents for the very reason that he failed to become a shepherd. During his enquiry he could not prove Maarman's hatred towards Flip. Then he humiliated Maarman by calling "you creeping yellow hottentot bastard, what are you all made of." (p. 14.) This remark expresses the ill treatment of the white masters and the sufferings of the coloured shepherds in South Africa during the colonial period.

When Maarman told the detectives the news which he collected from Flip's servant about the money in the safe which was stolen, the detectives forced Maarman to accompany them in search of the safe. His wife Sara stood motionless praying for his safety and return of her husband.

The next morning, the second shepherd met Flip's son and informed him that the police had taken away Enoch Maarman and he had not returned. Flip's son got angry and humiliated him saying, "Do you know it was my father who was killed?" (p. 18.) These insulting words silenced him and he felt ashamed and joined his companions in the corner,

At noon, Solomon Koopman, Sara's brother, standing at the gate informed her that her husband was dead. He told the story of his death just in the same way the police had told him. It was during the dark night when they were searching for the 'safe', Enoch slipped on a big stone and fell and so he was taken to the hospital for treatment but he died in the car and was buried.

Sara had many doubts regarding her husband's death. She felt that his death happened in the darkness and also why they could not give her husband's body to her. She wished that his body should have been buried in the hills where he had worked for fifty years. She expressed her intention to see the death certificate and would like to know by whose orders he had been buried.

At last, the death certificate was shown to her and the content of the certificate was *death due to sub-cranial bleeding*. (p. 22.) She desired to see Robbertse, in order to find out the reason for her husband's death, but he kept himself away from the office. When she questioned about his burial, the police replied, "it was an order from a high person." (p. 23.) She was suppressed and was prevented from asking questions as she was considered to be of an inferior race.

Within twenty four hours Hendrik Baadjies, the second shepherd conveyed the news from Flip's son (Baas Gysbert), that he needed a new shepherd and also Enoch Maarman's house, for the new shepherd to live in. Sara was given three days to pack up her things. But she decided to leave earlier than the time given to her. She hoped to leave the land of stone for a better life with her son who was in the 'Cape'.

During the colonial rule the natives were allocated land by colonizers. Alan Paton portrayed this condition in his novel *Cry the Beloved Country*. "There was a system whereby a native could get land from the farmer setup his kraal and have his family." (p. 163.) After the death of her husband a woman was not allowed to have land there and she had to leave the land and house according to the custom. So during the colonial period women were segregated and neglected.

In the short story, the poor innocent shepherd Enoch Maarman was considered to be the murderer and was killed and his wife was forced to leave the house. They did not show any interest in finding out the real culprit and their intention was *tit for tat*.

CONCLUSIONS

Alan Paton dreams of a new South Africa, getting rid of all racial discriminations and oppressions and he envisions Abraham Lincoln's dream. "One day . . . little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls." (p. 46.) When this vision is fulfilled there won't be any discrimination in South Africa.

Alan Paton demands from the readers not merely comprehension and appreciation but action.

REFERENCES

1. Paton Alan. *Tales from a Troubled Land*. Newyork: Scribner, 2003.
2. _____. *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Newyork: Scribner, 2003.
3. Prabhakar K. ed. *Guiding Lights: An Anthology of Prose*. Chennai: Emerald Publishers, 2000.
4. Welsh Frank. ed. *A History of South Africa*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000.

